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News Release

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WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Margot S. Damaser, Ph.D., and Eric J. Huang, M.D., Ph.D., of the Department of Veterans Affairs, were among 59 federal scientists and engineers who received Presidential Early Career Awards at the White House Oct. 24. The annual awards, established by President Clinton in 1996, recognize young scientists and engineers who show "exceptional potential for leadership at the frontiers of scientific knowledge."

Dr. Damaser, of the Hines, Ill., VA Hospital, received the award for "outstanding research on the human urinary bladder using mathematical modeling along with physiological and neurological studies." Damaser, a biomechanical engineer, has used additional training in urology to design innovative studies on issues such as urinary incontinence and the special bladder problems faced by patients with spinal cord injury and multiple sclerosis. Her work on quantifying bladder-pressure measurements and understanding bladder mechanics is helping to advance prevention and treatment of bladder problems. In addition to her VA position, she is an assistant professor of urology at Loyola University of Chicago.

Dr. Huang, of the San Francisco VA Medical Center, was recognized for "creative research investigating Alzheimers disease and Parkinsons disease by studying factors involved in the survival of neurons." A pathologist, Huang aims to understand what drives nerve-cell death in these diseases. He is studying growth factors -- proteins involved in cell growth -- to learn more about their role in neuronal survival and differentiation. His work may contribute to new treatments and preventive measures for aging-related and other neurodegenerative diseases. Huang is a staff physician with VA and an assistant professor of pathology at the University of California, San Francisco.

Damaser and Huang will each receive \$125,000 over five years from VAs Office of Research and Development to foster their pioneering research. As part of its research mission, VA supports more than 2,300 scientists at 106 VA medical centers across the country, with an annual research budget of more than \$320 million.